

Sussex Fostering & Children's Services (SFCS)

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Sussex Fostering and Children's Services (SFCS) is an independent fostering agency which operates from Cop Hall House on the outskirts of Polegate, East Sussex. The Agency was previously known as Banya Eastbourne, being part of a larger London agency. Sussex Fostering and Children's Services became independent in 2005 and relocated to their present administrative centre at Cop Hall House. The service is small, having 12 approved fostering households and 21 foster carers. A total of 12 young people were placed with the Agency during this inspection. The service shares a joint fostering panel with the Banya Agency in London.

Summary

This inspection took place over two and a half days. Pre inspection documentation was completed and of 14 questionnaires sent to young people, foster carers, placing social workers, education, local authority, and parents 10 were returned. The service facilitated contact with foster carers, staff, young people and provided all the required documentation during the inspection. Feedback was given to the registered manager and the responsible individual.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The following actions have been taken to meet the requirements of the last inspection. All foster carers have received training in the management of safeguarding, medication, young people's monies, and first aid. Training has been given to identified foster carers to support their knowledge of transition. Review notes are held by the foster carers to inform them of the changes to the care plan. Concerns relating to safeguarding have been reported to the local authority. Incidents identified in Schedule 8 are being reported to the regulatory body. The procedure of safe caring is contained within the foster carer's handbook. In the event of specific risks being known risk assessments are put in place by the Agency. There are risk assessments in place for activities. The Agency maintains a register of all foster carers. A quality assurance programme is in place and being developed to include the requirements of Schedule 8. The following actions have been taken to meet the recommendations of the last report. An accident book is now maintained. Original qualifications are seen during the recruitment process and copies are signed and dated. Supervision notes are more detailed to show the progress of the young people placed with the Agency.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Foster carers follow the guidance of the health care plan detailed in the Looked After Children (LAC) documentation. The young people are registered with general practitioners (GP), dentists, opticians, orthodontic specialists and have access to the children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) as required. In house play therapy and counselling is available and is arranged in consultation with the placing authority. Foster carers confirm the significant benefits of these procedures to the young people. The Agency records all accidents reported to them concerning the young people, and hard copies are collected from the foster carers at each monthly supervision. Foster carers are pro-active in seeking medical support for the young people in their care; always keeping the Agency informed. The four monthly reports written

by the foster carers clearly show how and when health needs are met, and are progressing; trends and themes are explored through the quality assurance. All the fostered young people have a 'red book' detailing their health history to date. All foster carers are currently trained in first aid and medication. The recording of medication does not clarify if a homely or prescribed medicine is administered. Where doses of prescribed medicines are omitted there is no recorded explanation.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The registered manager is a member of the joint panel and receives informal supervision from the panel Chair; also professional supervision in the locality. She attends external training which is then cascaded to staff and foster carers. The registered manager is involved in all aspects of the Agency and aware of all developments with young people, foster carers and staff. Many of the young people placed are now settled into permanent placements; four between two and five years. There have been no disruptions. Admission to new placements are planned. Matching is carefully considered and recorded and placing authorities are fully involved in the process. The service continues to seek to recruit foster carers from ethnic minorities, which so far has been unsuccessful despite a planned process. The service is now working with a community project supporting people from black and minority ethnic (BME) heritage to support recruitment. All staff and foster carers are trained in safeguarding measures for the protection of young people and children. The local authority is kept informed of safeguarding concerns; no actions have been taken. The Agency works closely with schools to support and meet the needs of young people where there are safeguarding concerns. There is a very low level of restraint. When it is recorded the bound book does not have page numbers. The reports following incidents and restraints lack salient details. No young people have been absent from their foster homes without permission. All supervising social workers (SSW) are qualified, experienced and registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Some assessments are done by an outside agency; and are scrutinised by the registered manager. The Agency employs an experienced worker to support foster carers in the management of the young people. The registered manager supervises all the staff. The registered individual, who provides play therapy for young people placed with the Agency, has external professional supervision. A re-employment of a SSW took place since the last inspection and the Agency did not follow all their policies and procedures. Minutes of the joint panel support good practice. The registered manager and a SSW from the Agency attend each panel. The Chair of the panel is positive about the Agency's involvement. The format of the panel meets regulatory requirements and any shortfall is addressed through panel advisors. The panel is multicultural in ethnicity and language. Scrutiny is robust with all the assessments and a wide range of approval is only confirmed if all areas of the assessment are strong. All first and third year reviews are invited to panel.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff promote tolerance and diversity through training and resources. The foster carers consulted outlined their strategies to offer their foster children information and local community groups to support the young people with a black or minority ethnic (BME) heritage. Feedback from pre-inspection questionnaires stated: 'It appears a very inclusive service- several of the Agency staff are from different cultural backgrounds'. Some foster families take their foster children on holidays and extend their understanding and knowledge of their heritage. One

young person returned their questionnaire saying: 'I am loved and cared for and feel part of the family'. Life story work and counselling is offered in negotiation with placing authorities and foster carers confirm the benefits to the young people in their care. Some birth families are engaged in this vital work and therapist and foster carers described the positive advantages to all involved. Feedback from a placing social worker in pre-inspection questionnaires stated: 'Sussex Fostering are one of the best Agencies who provide good, appropriate tailor made services to the carers and the child' Personal educational plans (PEP) and individual education plans (IEP) are in place in the files sampled. Where a young person is not following a full educational timetable there is evidence of significant support for the fostering household and the needs of the young person through full liaison with the school, children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), department for educational special needs and paediatricians. Young people are supported with the Agency's support worker together with access to a breakfast club and after school club at the Agency's premises. Feedback from foster carers via the pre-inspection questionnaires stated: 'The fostering Agency actively advocates on behalf of the child to access appropriate education.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Foster carers feel supported by the Agency when facilitating contact with birth families. When this is not possible in the fostering household the Agency offers their property so that the family has access to several rooms; a dining area, a kitchen, a playroom and large secure gardens. Birth families frequently use this occasion to enjoy a family meal in a relaxed environment. Reports are kept of contact to support evaluation. Placing social workers observe that foster carers 'encourage telephone contact with siblings'. The young people have a daily programme of arranged activities in the holiday once a week. These are attended by foster children, foster carers' children and Agency staff's children. The young people fill in feedback forms following their outings or events and these are kept on file. Those seen are positive. Each young person is given a pre-review booklet to complete with their foster carers if they wish. It is not noted if the young person declines and when it is completed it is frequently taken by the independent reviewing officer (IRO), consequently not able to be filed.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

The inspection did not raise any issues of concern in this area.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The statement of purpose has not recently been reviewed, nor the welcome pack leaflet for the young people. Supervising social workers (SSW) are all qualified social workers and experienced in a fostering service, the support worker is also experienced. Case loads are equitable. Some assessments are done in house or by an external agency. All assessments go to the joint panel as do foster carers' first and third reviews. There is a training programme throughout the year for foster carers which they are expected to attend; staff lead or support as necessary. Training is provided twice on each day to ensure that foster carers are able to attend, feedback forms collate the post training comments. Those seen are positive. SSW's provide recorded monthly supervision for the foster carers, the latter also complete a four month report which considers all aspects of the young person placed under the Every Child

Matters (ECM) headings. This provides an excellent tool to evaluate the progress of each young person, and also supports discussion at reviews. The registered manager supervises her staff, but to date no appraisals have taken place. Each SSW has their own computer and all staff have monthly meetings and daily, extensive verbal discussion. Management meetings are held monthly and support the quality audit to meet regulations. The SSW's are experienced and qualified to support the 11 fostering households through monthly supervision. Staff have daily informal supervision with the management. In one personnel file seen a staff member has a job description that details Banya as the employer. The foster carers handbook has not been updated since 2005. The annual foster carers reviews have not all been successfully completed to date. Training that foster carers attend is detailed in their files. Foster carers spoke of significant support that they receive from the Agency staff. Feedback from placing social worker stated: 'Sussex fostering work very well with the carers and provide appropriate services for the child' The Agency keeps well documented records, which are stored safely. The four monthly reports completed by the foster carers are used to evaluate the progress and identified needs of each young person. Comments from PSW 's state: 'I thanked(carers) for their expert handling of this, once again thank you for the report', 'very stable placement- extremely capable carers', 'have been impressed with the level of service provided to and the quality of support you provide to your carers' There has been one complaint recorded, not all the correspondence was on file. All young people who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire commented that they knew how to make a complaint; this information is contained in the children's guide but the addresses of contact agencies are not current. One incident involving a young person contained a verbal complaint. The incident was fully addressed, but not identified as a complaint, so the matter was not followed through using the complaints procedure and a final outcome was not recorded.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
15	follow clear procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff/foster carers to ensure children are protected. Regulation 20 (1)(a) Schedule 1	13 September 2007
17	ensure that foster carers annual reviews are scheduled on time. Regulation 29 (2)	10 December 2007
16	ensure that the staff have annual appraisals. Schedule 7	31 December 2007
1	review the statement of purpose and children's guide regularly. Regulation 3(1),(3)	10 December 2007
9	ensures that records from foster carers relating to any measure of control, restraint or discipline fully detail the circumstances of each incident. Regulation 13 (2) (b) ©	13 September 2007

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that all complaints logged have correspondence attached and the final outcome is recorded.
- ensure that the foster carers hand book is reviewed.
- should number the pages of restraint log.
- record if medication administered is homely or prescribed and account for dosage not given.

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.